

Message Text

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46

ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCS-03 SCA-01 CAB-02 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4086

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR CASC BE US

SUBJECT: ZEIZURE OF AIR CALEDONIA PLANE

REF: BRUSSELS 4646

1. SUMMARY: AIR CALEDONIA PLANE RELEASED BY COURT JUNE 2 AND LEFT OSTEND WITH 111 PASSENGERS JUNE 4. CONDUCT OF AIR CALEDONIA IN THIS MATTER SUGGESTS THAT AN EXAMINATION OF THEIR FITNESS TO CARRY PASSENGERS IS IN ORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. AGREEMENT ARRIVED AT BETWEEN AIR CALEDONIA (AC) REPRESENTATIVE AND BELGIAN COMPLAINANT DURING PAST WEEKEND, AND COURT LIFTED SEIZURE OF DC-8 REGISTRATION NUMBER N-6573-C ON JUNE 2. WE UNDERSTAND THAT AC PAID ALL OR PART OF CLAIM TOTALLING MORE THAN DOLS 60,000 IN ORDER TO EFFECT RELEASE OF AIRCRAFT.

3. AC THEN ARRANGED FOR PILOT AND CREW TO COME FROM US TO OSTEND, AND APPARENTLY RECRUITED ADDITIONAL PASSENGERS TO REPLACE AT LEAST A PORTION OF THOSE WHO HAD ALREADY MADE OTHER ARRANGEMENTS TO RETURN TO US. ACCORDING TO OSTEND TRAVEL AGENT AND PASSENGER WITH WHOM WE SPOKE, AN ASSORTMENT

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OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING MANY WHO CAME OUT WITH MAY 11 FLIGHT

BUT ALSO GROUPS AND SINGLES SIGNED UP FOR RETURN ONLY, GATHERED AT OSTEND ON JUNE 2. CREW DID NOT ARRIVE UNTIL AROUND 1700 JUNE 3, AND REQUESTED PASSENGERS TO ASSEMBLE BY 2000 FOR DEPARTURE BEFORE AIRPORT CLOSING TIME AT 2300. FOR SOME REASON, PLANE DID NOT TAKE OFF BY THAT TIME, AND 111 PASSENGERS WERE OBLIGED TO REMAIN AT AIRPORT OVERNIGHT, WITH NO PROVISION FOR FOOD OR SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION. AIRCRAFT FINALLY TOOK OFF AT 0520 JUNE 4. (FAA BRUSSELS FOLLOWED UP AND ADVISED FAA IN US TO MEET AIRCRAFT ON ARRIVAL IN SALT LAKE CITY.)

4. BELGIAN AVIATION AUTHORITIES HAVE ROUTINELY GIVEN INITIAL APPROVAL TO 21 MORE AC FLIGHTS BETWEEN US AND OSTEND THIS SUMMER. NEXT ON IS SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE JUNE 9. THEY ARE CONSIDERING WHETHER THEY SHOULD PERMIT THESE FLIGHTS TO OPERATE IN LIGHT OF QUESTIONABLE MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL AND SAFETY PRACTICES OF AC. THEY HAVE ASKED EMBASSY CONFIDENTIALLY WHETHER US CIVAIR AUTHORITIES HAVE ANY VIEWS ON THIS QUESTION.

5. BASED ON THIS EXPERIENCE, EMBASSY QUESTIONS WHETHER AIR CALEDONIA IS COMPETENT TO OPERATE PASSENGER FLIGHTS TO BELGIUM. WE URGE USG CIVAIR AUTHORITIES TO EXAMINE QUALIFICATIONS OF THIS AIR TRAVEL CLUB THOROUGHLY BEFORE AC CARRIES ADDITIONAL PASSENGER LOADS TO BELGIUM, INCLUDING FLIGHT SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 9 TO OSTEND. PLEASE INFORM EMBASSY PROMPTLY OF ANY ACTION TAKEN IN THIS MATTER SO THAT WE MAY CONTINUE TO COORDINATE WITH BELGIAN AERONAUTICS ADMINISTRATION.
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